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SUBJECT: IRATE EMBASSY NEIGHBORS SEEK LEGAL REDRESS

¶1. Summary: The June 28, 2003, closure of the street in front of the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum for security reasons is once again getting press attention. Some 29 merchants and residents negatively affected by the closure of Ali Abdel Latif Street reportedly are seeking compensation from the U.S. Government for damages related to the street closure. The group claims that the street closure has damaged their business activity and lowered real estate values in the area adjacent to the Embassy. End Summary.

¶2. The Arabic daily "Alwan" reported on December 21 that 29 merchants and residents of Ali Abdel Latif Street in Khartoum are pursuing legal action against the U.S. Embassy, claiming that the closure of their street for security reasons in June 2003 has cost them revenue and lowered property values. The group has compiled details of the material damages suffered by the businesses, and it holds the U.S. Embassy responsible for those damages. (Note: Ordinarily, a lawsuit in Sudan is filed with the courts by a professional lawyer. In this case, however, the Embassy's unhappy neighbors have approached the Sudanese Bar Association with their complaint. The Sudanese Bar Association leadership is known to harbor anti-American sentiments. End note.)

¶3. The plaintiffs reportedly met with the Khartoum State Governor and the Director of Khartoum Province to air their grievances. At that meeting, the group demanded compensation. In addition to losing money because of the road closure, the group claims that they have suffered "social embarrassment" because they are unable to host wedding parties, funeral ceremonies, and other social events.

¶4. The "Alwan" article comes after a similar article appeared in the Arabic daily "Al-Intibaha" on December 18. "Al-Intibaha," which has an anti-U.S. editorial slant, reported that the merchants and residents on the street were upset that the closure was negatively affecting them. They called for an immediate reopening of the street.

¶5. Comment: Earlier this year, the Embassy invoked its right to renew the street closure for another three years by Diplomatic Note to the MFA (as stipulated in the agreement between the Embassy and the State of Khartoum). To date, the Embassy has received no notification of any legal action having been brought against it by its neighbors.

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